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Article (Accepted version) (Refereed)

Original citation:

Lacatus, Cora, Schade, Daniel and Yao, Yuan (2015) Quo vadis IR: method, methodology and innovation. Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 43 (3). ISSN 0305-8298 (In Press)

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Available in LSE Research Online: May 2015

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Quo Vadis IR: Method, Methodology and Innovation¹

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Abstract

This introduction to the special conference issue for the 2014 Millennium Conference on Method, Methodology and Innovation aims to provide a background to the conference theme, as well as the articles included in this issue. It hence serves to outline the reasoning for holding a conference on method and methodology in International Relations, it situates the present debate within a broader context, elaborates on why Millennium is a journal that is well suited to host such a debate, and offers an overview over the different contributions made in this issue.

Keywords

Method, methodology, ontology, epistemology, innovation

Acknowledgements

The Editors would like to thank the conference participants and the contributors to this special issue, as well as the reviewers for valuable input and a timely peer review process. A special thank you goes to the two keynote speakers and the response pieces for framing the general lines of debate. We are grateful to Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Samuel Barkin for insightful comments on previous drafts of the introduction to the special issue. Any errors remain ours.

At a lunchtime session during the 2014 Millennium Conference discussing in depth the keynote speeches at the conference, Cynthia Weber faced the Millennium editors and addressed them with the question included in their own conference title: “Where do we go from here?” The question sparked heated debate among IR scholars in the room at the time, and in different epistemological guises, was considered in papers and roundtable presentations. In addressing some of the discussions started at the conference, this introduction will consider the place that the conference occupies in the field of International Relations in relation to debates on methods and methodologies that have already taken place in the past. Similarly worth considering is why Millennium is an ideal place to have the present conversation. In presenting the main themes that arise from rich conversations at roundtables and panels during the two days of the conference, as well as the articles included in this special issue, the editors aim to trace directions of research interest that have congealed during the conference and will hopefully continue to grow in the pages of future volumes of Millennium and elsewhere.

Many debates on methods and methodology have taken place since Paul Feyerabend challenged academics in 1975 to abandon the search for truth through method and declared that methodologically-speaking “anything goes”². In International Relations specifically, the pursuit of a rigorous method has since

¹ This article is the introduction to the special conference issue, including a selection of papers presented at the 2014 annual Millennium conference, entitled *Quo vadis IR: Methods, Methodologies and Innovation in International Relations*.

² Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, 3rd ed. (London: Verso, 1993), 18.

become much more important. This is why talking methods has undoubtedly become even more important. Today methods are the object of categorisation, however (un)satisfactory, such as quantitative or qualitative, or textual, visual, numeric, etc. They can be taught systematically and apprenticeship-style, “by doing”. They can be the object of researchers’ personal preferences and fit different designs, puzzles, and research questions setting the direction of investigation. In other words, individual methods and their mixing can go in and out of academic style and can be the object of institutional and curricular practices. Though something fundamental in the nature of the preoccupation with methods changes when one also considers methodology, as the conversation opens up, or better yet, turns back onto itself to bring to present awareness the philosophy that underlies all knowing and knowledge production.

At this point, methods become tools of investigation whose contextual nature is no longer suspended in a space dictated by subjective preferences or objective constraints, but rather dictated by ontological commitments that drive any scholarly pursuit of the international. Though not necessarily a surprising point for many readers of *Millennium*, it is fair to say that the open and constructive consideration of methods and methodologies beyond the quantitative/qualitative divide is rare in today’s academe. To this effect, the conference offered a setting for dialogue among International Relations academics interested in furthering the discussion of contemporary practices of argumentation and inference in our field and to explore future directions for research. While our aim was to solicit papers presenting methodological innovations—such as new types of data and means of measurement, original comparative approaches to new social and political phenomena, and cross-disciplinary arguments—the ensuing presentations and discussions at the conference broadened the scope of the debate even further.

Best practice in contemporary International Relations calls for researchers to pick either the quantitative or the qualitative camp when carrying out a research project and defining a research agenda. One can “market” oneself as a qualitative or quantitative scholar or, when daring, a mixed methods researcher. By conflating a number of methodological tools and positions in either group, categories such as quantitative and qualitative methods become broad and unsystematic ways to make sense of the international reality surrounding us against the epistemological spirit they illustrate. By this logic, research employing critical methods or concerning itself with conceptual work, text and narratives—all treated as realities other than numbers—belongs to the qualitative camp. Such division goes beyond informing just differences of personal opinion and wind up driving academic practices of doctoral training and institutional hiring decisions. Often, this duality does not spur constructive dialogue or innovative intellectual debate, but rather becomes a self-perpetuating divisive labelling mechanism that accentuates disciplinary boundaries.

With its multi- and inter-disciplinary nature, IR is arguably the field where such dialogue among scholars identifying with different “camps”, or scholars who do not care for belonging to any “camp” at all, can occur constructively. To this effect, the conference aimed to provide a stimulating intellectual setting for a major step in the right direction of a dialogue. A discussion on methods in International Relations today is in need of depth— the

kind of depth that does not shy away from pushing against the limits of 'best practice' conventions. The kind of depth that dares to contest uncritical allegiance to the production of scholarship aimed to fit established methodological divides (i.e. qualitative/quantitative or neopositivist/non-neopositivist) and ask questions about the relevance of grouping such diverse tools of research, labelling them all "qualitative," and treating them as fundamentally different from statistical methods designed to quantify the study of the international. Such courage is not blind, however, but rather is driven by the know-how of methods training as tied to the frameworks of certain research designs and, very importantly, the intellectual readiness to reflect on the ontological and epistemological dimensions of methodological choices.

While to our knowledge a consideration of methods and methodology in International Relations along the lines that we proposed is something unique, we do see the conference's theme and debates as part of a broader discussion that is taking place within the field.

Some of the issues raised in the discussions of EJIR's special issue on *The End of International Relations Theory?*³ have provided an important backdrop for the discussions that took place at the Millennium conference, and particularly on issues related to what constitutes science and how International Relations scholars relate to these debates. One of our keynote speakers, Andrew Bennett, had an article in EJIR's special issue where he highlighted the problems that arise out of structuring IR research around different 'isms'⁴. In the conference keynote, Bennett made a strong claim for the power of mixing methods, rather than interpreting them distinctly. While not explicitly aiming to mix methods, Jörg Friedrichs and Friedrich Kratochwil have equally argued for a more pragmatic approach towards methods in the past⁵. A more recent article by Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans⁶ has equally contended that methods in themselves cannot be considered neutral, something that was discussed again in more detail at the Millennium conference in a series of panels organised by the same authors, and—amongst others—by Cecile Basberg Neumann and Iver Neumann. In addition, Millennium itself has engaged with Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's recent work in a forum⁷ discussing his book *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*. Through the forum and book, Jackson had already raised issues further

³ Time Dunne, Lene Hansen, Colin Wight, eds., 'The End of International Relations Theory?', Special Issue, *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no 3 (2013).

⁴ Andrew Bennett, 'The mother of all isms: Causal mechanisms and structured pluralism in International Relations theory', *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no 3 (2013), 459-481.

⁵ Jörg Friedrichs, Friedrich Kratochwil, 'On Acting and Knowing: How Pragmatism Can Advance International Relations Research and Methodology', *International Organization* 63, no 4 (2009), 701-731.

⁶ Claudia Aradau, Jef Husymans 'Critical methods in International Relations: The politics of techniques, devices and acts', *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no 3 (2014).

⁷ Maria Fotou, Nick Srnicek, eds., Special Forum on the Conduct of Inquiry, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 2 (2013), 247-378.

developed with his conference keynote⁸, and particularly discussing the status of International Relations as a *science*. J. Ann Tickner equally raised the important issue of a necessary dialogue between International Relations scholars from different methodological backgrounds, arguing for a pluralist understanding of what can be considered scientific knowledge⁹. This contribution was part of Millennium's 2010 conference on *International Relations in Dialogue*.

Building on its tradition of supporting the publication of theoretical scholarship grounded in philosophy and critical inquiry and the above, Millennium is hence uniquely positioned to host this debate on the role and direction of International Relations' engagement with methods and methodology. To this end, the conference welcomed contributions that actively sought to investigate the ontological commitments and the empirical implications of employing methods that position themselves outside the conventional boundaries of the qualitative/quantitative divide that defines the training of students and the production of scholarly work in the field today. Aware of the need to understand the philosophical considerations that drive each methodological choice in the field, many participants at the conference rigorously interrogated the relationships between methodology and the selection of different methods as tools endemic in certain research designs. They also considered both the risks and the richness of engaging with more than one method at a time within the framework of a certain research design, conventionally labelled "mixed or multi-method(s) research." The limits of methodological investigation were also challenged by harnessing the cross-disciplinarity specific to IR and proposing innovative uses of methods from other fields of inquiry that are arguably better suited to explain the complex realities examined by International Relations scholars.

By hosting talks that consider the methods-methodology-ontology triad with a view on its relevance for academic scholarship in the field and the innovative application of methods, mixed or not, which could be labelled as "new" for the study of international relations, the conference reached its intended goal of directing everyone's attention toward the need to ground all pursuit of IR research in philosophy and the necessity to push the limits of IR's conventional methodological divide through innovation. In other words, the innovative spirit of the conference lies in the call for more awareness and a fuller understanding of our choices along the axis of the conceptual triad when carrying out research in international politics.

A brief consideration of the etymological and philosophical origins of the concepts making up this triad helps to draw the bounds of the main positions of the conference presenters and the trajectories of argumentation developed further in the articles enclosed below. Etymologically, the word *ontology* is a

⁸ Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Preparing the Ground for a More Hospitable International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 2 (2013), 367-378.

⁹ J. Ann Tickner, 'Dealing with Difference: Problems and Possibilities for Dialogue in International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39, no. 3 (2013), 607-618.

compound derived from the Greek *ontos*, meaning “being; that which is”¹⁰ and the suffix *-ology*, meaning “science or discipline of.”¹¹ Put simply, the primary ontological concern is with what reality is or what can be said to be/exist in reality. Different answers to the question “What is reality?” rest on varying assumptions about reality, which in turn inform the way(s) we approach research. If reality is made up of facts to be investigated, one is more comfortable making use of experiments and their causal logic of inference to study international politics. In contrast, reality can be understood as fluid and constructed, as well as the result of human perception and claims about it. These views of the world that inform our pursuit of research are fundamentally different and, as such, un-mixable. Like the whiskey-making process evoked by Patrick Thaddeus Jackson¹², ontologies cannot be mixed.

Now even if reality exists, how can we know it? Questions of knowing belong in the realm of epistemology. The science or study (*logos*) of *epistēmē*, or “knowledge, understanding”¹³ aims to offer insight into how our assumptions about what can be known inform what we choose to investigate in our research. Whether a constructivist, an empiricist, an idealist, or a realist, we engage in research that is based primarily on certain types of knowing, such as the human constructs of knowledge, subjectivity versus a neutral objectivity, or through the predominance of the senses¹⁴. Our approaches to knowing reality, or our epistemologies, cannot be mixed either.

When, as discussed by Laura Sjoberg and Samuel Barkin in this issue, IR research is seen as “work seeking knowledge about the normative dimensions, constitution, working and/or functions of global politics,”¹⁵ methodological choices are made to link methods, as tools, with certain research designs and their central research questions. As argued also by Andrew Bennett in his keynote speech, researchers make methodological choices and the methods they employ in their pursuit of knowledge about international politics can be mixed. Such mixing is, however, limited to methods available in IR researchers’ toolbox and do not extend to the realm of epistemologies or ontologies.

¹⁰ ‘onto-, comb. form’, *OED Online*, March 2015, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/131538> (accessed April 29, 2015).

¹¹ “-ology, comb. form”, *OED Online*, March 2015, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/131143> (accessed April 29, 2015).

¹² See Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, ‘Must International Studies be A Science?’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

¹³ ‘episteme, n.’, *OED Online*, March 2015, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/63540> (accessed April 29, 2015).

¹⁴ Barry Stroud, ‘The History of Epistemology’, *Erkenntnis* 75, no. 3 (2011), 495–503

¹⁵ See J. Samuel Barkin, and Laura Sjoberg, ‘Calculating Critique: Thinking Outside the Methods Matching Game’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

On the meaning of (not) mixing

The two keynote speeches provided a perfect frame for the overall debate that took place at the conference and set the stage for a weekend of challenging our field-specific research practices in good critical spirit. Concerned with mixing as an attribute of IR research, the keynote speeches take different directions when engaging with the method-methodology-ontology triad and speak about two essentially different types of mixing and their respective degrees of possibility.

Concerned with diverse types of knowing and the need to keep the tools of their inquiry separate in their philosophy and language-grounded purity, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, in his keynote, calls for the celebration of methodological distinctiveness¹⁶. Like distilling whiskey—which provided for the metaphor at the core of his address—International Relations is not a science as much as a form of art. As such, the *do-ing* of International Relations need not necessarily equate with systematic scientific inquiry, but rather ought to be mindful of different types of knowing that can co-exist under the umbrella of our inter-disciplinary field. A word of warning, however, is in order—the existence of diverse types of knowing the international does not pave the way to mixing them at will. The purity of one’s ontological commitment to a specific kind of knowing precedes and at the same time drives any research design and method one employs in it. Rooted in Wittgenstein and his language-based reading of the world, any preoccupation with the international is a unique act of knowing, interpretation and analysis that, like whiskey, does not allow for mixing. As the mixing of methods is an endeavor disconnected from the ontology driving it and thus could only offer incomplete answers to questions asked by International Relations scholars.

By way of contrast, Andrew Bennett makes a case for mixing methods and emphasizes that, when mixed well, they have the power to bridge epistemological divides¹⁷. To him, methods are tools that serve data-specific purposes and assist scholars to reach clearly defined research goals. In the case of textual data, analysis of content and discourse can complement each other and offer a multi-faceted interpretation of the text as data and proxy for complex political and social realities. To the extent that mixing is an analytical tool-based practice resulting in a more refined understanding of a complex political reality, methods can serve a purpose that is further removed from a concern with methodological purity. By this logic, an awareness of philosophy is important, but does not ultimately drive the pursuit of *knowledge-making* in International Relations. The rationale for placing a strong emphasis at the conference on mixed methods in International Relations is also driven by recent institutional developments in academia, which encourage doctoral students to engage in increasingly methodologically complex research that encompasses more than one method.

¹⁶ See Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, ‘Must International Studies be A Science?’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

¹⁷ See See Andrew Bennett, ‘Found in Translation: Combining Discourse Analysis with Computer Assisted Content Analysis’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

By this metric, the creativity of political research projects is defined as a twofold measure of the extent to which they incorporate quantitative methods and, equally importantly, the degree of methodological diversity. Andrew Bennett's speech speaks directly to this reality and, moreover, offers an example of how textual data lends itself to the complementary use of algorithm-based analysis and discourse-driven interpretation. In his speech, creativity of research design is illustrated by the application of different methods but can only lead to the production of good research outputs if it is performed in a systematic fashion. Mixing methods serves as a way to go beyond the quantitative/qualitative divide by placing a stronger focus on the nature of the data and the appropriateness of certain methods as tools of its analysis.

Without a doubt, Jackson's and Bennett's keynote speeches stand in methodological contrast—in the spirit of the conference, however, this contrast is, above all else, an invitation to open dialogue and proof that “camps” are only as important as any other disciplinary convention. In other words, whiskey remains important regardless of the means of its production.

This co-existence of methodological diversity and openness to dialogue is also reflected in the response pieces to the two keynote speeches, solicited from conference guests and contributors to this conference issue. Written by scholars of International Relations with different methodological training and preferences, these short response articles create an intellectual context for the two main directions of thought informing the conference. In a sense, these short articles re-create in written form the spirit of the conversations taking place at the conference. Central to these responses are considerations of the extent to which our discipline ought to strive to operate methodologically more like ‘a science’ of the sociopolitical at the international level, turn to aesthetics and its representational sensitivity, or behave more as a discipline that consistently considers closely the fine balance between interdisciplinarity and its methodological implications.

Be them diverse and mix-able, or decidedly distinct and inextricably tied to specific ontologies and epistemologies, the arguments proposed by the authors of the response pieces find common ground in three main aspects: first, they all agree that methods and methodological commitments are two sides of the same epistemological coin, shaping the very nature and direction of the discipline. As researchers, each choice we make has complex implications that go beyond the bounds of research projects' designs as they enter the realms of teaching, policy-making, and the systems of governance of our discipline.

The discussions of the keynotes also speak to the overarching principle that drove the conceptualization and planning of the conference, namely the possibility of a continued dialogue about what methods represent for scholars of International Relations, taking into consideration their diverse methodological preferences and experiences. They challenge the main arguments, praise their brilliant engagement with debates in the field, and critique limitations inherent in all processes of argumentation. Importantly, also, they point to new directions in which the authors and now their readers can take the discussion.

A tour d'horizon

Over the three days in October, LSE's Clement House filled up with animated conversation and open debate about methods and methodologies, punctuated by occasional vehement counter-argumentation and public interventions. The topics discussed by conference participants and guests were all informed by a generally vivid interest in the wider topic of the conference, while illustrating the diversity of scholarly pursuits in the field of International Relations. The two roundtables of the conference provided examples of such more focused directions of research—methods and methodological considerations for critical studies and the pursuit of innovation in methods and methodology. Topics discussed at the roundtables reflected the diversity of academic backgrounds and interests among the participants; a selection of the topics raised at the conference has been developed further in article version and are enclosed in this volume.

Cynthia Weber spoke about the relevance of queer critical scholarship for the study of international relations and illustrated it with a discussion of the representations of the 2014 Eurovision Contest winner, Conchita Wurst; Lene Hansen elaborated on the methodological implications of integrating both texts and images in the critical study of international relations; Milja Kurki and Can Mutlu proposed arguments that they develop further in the article version of their speeches published here, compelling us to search for inspiration in the pedagogical value of failure in our research¹⁸ or in the scholarship of theoretical physicists and cosmologists as attempts to reach a condition of methodological openness through conceptual “stretching.”¹⁹

Relatedly, Mark Salter spoke of a unique path to innovation in our field through the consideration of failure as an epistemological condition and integral part of our field-specific research designs—a topic which will be discussed in detail at the 2015 Millennium conference on “Failure and Denial in World Politics”. Michele Acuto analysed in ethnographic spirit the experience of being a scholar of diplomacy and international relations who teaches in a school of engineering. Samuel Barkin and Laura Sjoberg propose that quantitative tools of research are compatible with critical methodological pursuits and elaborate on the epistemological implications of such “mixing” in the article included in this volume²⁰. Cecilie Basberg Neumann and Iver Neumann discuss the blurring of methodological divides between data collection and data production and the role

¹⁸ See Can Mutlu, ‘How (not) to disappear completely: Pedagogical Potential of Research Methods in International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

¹⁹ See Milja Kurki, ‘Stretching Situated Knowledge: From Standpoint Epistemology to Cosmology and Back Again’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

²⁰ See J. Samuel Barkin, and Laura Sjoberg, ‘Calculating Critique: Thinking Outside the Methods Matching Game’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

of ethnographic self-situatedness, an argument also developed further in the article version²¹.

Closely linked to the considerations advanced in the two keynote roundtables, the article by Samuel Barkin and Laura Sjoberg elaborates on the need to challenge assumptions regarding the artificial linkages between disciplinary traditions of inquiry and their ‘appropriate’ methods—they emphasize the need to broaden the scope of the traditional methodological debate by proposing the use of tools appropriated by quantitative methodologists in reflexivist research. This pairing practice is not a gesture toward an unbounded freedom to “mix” methods or methodologies, but rather an illustration of a systematic and philosophically informed manner in which the toolbox of methods available to reflexivist scholars can be enhanced. The necessity and transformative power of such a matching exercise also inform arguments by the same authors in their individual response pieces²² to Andrew Bennett’s keynote speech on mixing methods for computerised and discourse-based analysis of text.

The interest in questioning the methodological practices of the field is also shared by Milja Kurki in her article centred on the benefits of carefully considering situated knowledge production in IR. Kurki calls for methodological openness in the field of IR and turns to the “hard sciences”, as represented by theoretical physicists and cosmologists, not for the acquisition of technical tools that would provide the basis for a systematic method of inquiry, but rather for learning about a form of ‘conceptual stretching.’ Such an exercise would allow the cross-disciplinary IR scholar concerned with critical theory and meta-theory to reach beyond the established methods of the study of situatedness—reflexive dialogue and attentiveness to the positionality of various knowers participating in the design of social situatedness,—by engaging in a process of imaginative conceptual ‘stretching.’ Cecilie Basberg Neuman and Iver Neumann also concern themselves with situatedness as an ontological and epistemological condition, by investigating closely the positionality of the self when carrying out research such as during ethnographic fieldwork. In the framework of their argument, the self is both embedded in data collection processes and becomes data as it gets written into autobiographical narratives of completed research to be subsequently integrated in analyses. The construction of meaning takes place in this precise autobiographical space of epistemological awareness positioned between the self as data and the self as researcher in charge of data collection, or else the self as method and as methodology.

What happens when one turns to the humanities-based tradition of narratives for methodological purposes? What considerations of systematicity, or theoretical innovation, ought to concern a reflexivist scholar when bringing into play subjective narratives as data for the study of international politics?

²¹ See Cecile Basberg Neumann, and Iver Neumann, ‘Uses of the Self: Two Ways of Thinking about Scholarly Situatedness and Method’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

²² See Laura Sjoberg, ‘What’s Lost in Translation? Neopositivism and Critical Research Interests’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX; J. Samuel Barkin, ‘Translatable? On Mixed Methods and Methodology’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

Sarah Naumes focuses her argument on narrative approaches, which have become increasingly popular in International Relations and considers their broader methodological and theoretical contributions to the discipline related to their use as both methods and as data²³. The author argues that narratives' transformative contribution to the discipline is contingent upon the researchers' explicit commitment to a reflexivist methodology. In Naumes's view, narratives are investigative instruments which have the potential to bring into question notions of congruity in theoretical thought and shed light on contradictions embedded in unpacked assumptions informing research practice in the discipline. They are also methodologically better suited to make visible the subjectivity that is written in all of our academic pursuits of knowledge-making and thus carry the power to push disciplinary boundaries toward more open lines of inquiry.

A number of papers in this special issue examine the explanatory powers of images and make the case for the disciplinary need to consider closely the methodological dimension of the recent years' "visual turn" in International Relations. Along parallel lines of argumentation, William Callahan, Roland Bleiker, Elena Barabatcheva and Andy Lawrence call attention to the need of contemporary IR scholars to reflect on the ubiquity of images in international politics and, more recently, their use as data by an increasing number of researchers in IR. The authors call for the need to investigate closely methods used in the study of visual international politics, by building on the reflexivist tradition in the "aesthetic turn" and its resistance to the conventional methodological divide of quantitative and qualitative methods²⁴ and highlighting the innovative potential of photographic and filmic images to capture aspects of international political reality that cannot otherwise be investigated. Images pose methodological challenges, in ways words do not any longer, and Roland Bleiker contends that only an interdisciplinary framework that allows for a pluralist employment of seemingly incompatible methods would make possible the analysis of the role images play in international politics²⁵. Self-reflectiveness is a necessary condition for a fair understanding of the complexities of visual global politics, while the relative irreconcilability of the clash of different methods is a challenge to be welcomed. When examining images, IR scholars need to necessarily embrace a state of self-awareness of their contingent standpoints and the tension of different co-existing perspectives. William Callahan argues that filmmaking can provide an innovative method for studying IR, due to its ability to breakdown essentialized self/other dichotomies. The author's auto-ethnographic documentary presents a filmic representation of "toilet adventures" based on the experiences of being a foreigner in China and vice versa and offers an illustration of estrangement and the affective dimension of foreignness that remains insufficiently explored when captured by ethnographic interviews alone. Along the same lines, Elena Barabatcheva and Andy Lawrence

²³ See Sarah Naumes, 'Is all "I" IR?', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

²⁴ See William A. Callahan, 'The Visual Turn in IR: Documentary Filmmaking as a Critical Method', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

²⁵ See Roland Bleiker, 'Pluralist Methods for Visual Global Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

propose in their article a different illustration of the representational power that filmmaking as a method carries in the context of exploring diasporas and identity dislocation²⁶, through a focus on the experience of British born Chinese youths living in Manchester. The theoretical aim of their project is the development of a contextualized understanding of individuals experiencing racialized forms of belonging.

Whether textual, visual, numeric, or data matching, certain research designs help us make sense of a complex world through narratives, typologies, and models. Methodologically, however, both data and the ways we conceive of it, as big/small or missing/valid/interview-based, etc., carry equal weight in methodological considerations of contemporary IR.

As researchers, the choices we make when we collect data, compute it or uncover the stories it contains are conscious acts that shape the direction of our discipline. Such considerations are central to the arguments proposed by Mutlu in the essay responding to Andrew Bennett's keynote speech²⁷ on mixing methods, where he considers the developments in the field of Information and Communication Technologies and the impact of "Big Data" on how scholars of International Relations conduct their research. Mutlu calls for the need for our discipline to examine the true measure of the innovative potential carried by Big Data. Importantly, Mutlu points also to the ethical dimension of all acts of data collection and the design of models and algorithms developed to make sense of them and the complex political world they capture.

Along similar lines of argumentation, David Chandler in his article on "Big Data"²⁸ discusses how an algorithms-based epistemological engagement with digital aspects of international politics, which builds on different types of Big Data, has both pedagogical, discursive, and governance implications worth investigating critically. Chandler proposes that the world seen through big data tools has surpassed modernist methodologist thought and become "posthuman," giving rise to new forms of (self-)governance that rely on more reflexive and process-based approaches. Epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning such data innovations are due for unpacking through critical investigation.

Methodological choices are ethical choices. All stages of research are contained by moral decisions, while methods are both technical tools and moral instruments that inform our training, teaching, and disciplinary governance. A closer examination of the centrality of data for social sciences research in Mutlu's argument²⁹ uncovers the need for a frank discussion regarding the transparency of research processes which, most importantly in the context of this article, have

²⁶ See Elena Barabantseva, Andy Lawrence, 'Encountering vulnerabilities through "filmmaking for fieldwork"', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

²⁷ See Can Mutlu, 'Of Algorithms, Data, and Ethics: A response to Andrew Bennett', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

²⁸ See David Chandler, 'A World without Causation: Big Data and the Coming of Age of Posthumanism', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

²⁹ See Can Mutlu, 'How (not) to disappear completely: Pedagogical Potential of Research Methods in International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

profound pedagogical implications. The article focuses on the need for IR researchers to consider the consequences of their decision to exclude their failures from methodological discussions—to essentially disappear from their own scholarly outputs. In an attempt not to over-determine the outcome of research through personal preferences and opinions, scholars erase marks of themselves and their failures from all stages of their research process and, with it, obliterate the pedagogical potential that failure carries. Such careful engagement with failure is also the object of investigation in Mark Salter's response essay to Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's keynote speech³⁰ and his intervention at the roundtable on methodological innovation at the conference. The broadly pedagogical implications of methodological choices are also closely considered by Meera Sabaratnam in her response piece³¹ which presents a discussion of how disciplinary preferences for certain methodological divides inform curriculum development, methods training courses, and also the milestones of academic career development. A critical assessment of the future consequences of such choices is not only vital for the health of our own disciplinary governance today, but also in need of continuous close examination.

Quo Vadis IR?

So, once again, where do we go from here? The 2014 Millennium conference and this special issue do not claim to have found a definitive answer, but rather set out to uncover (once more) a space for reflection and debate about the methodological state of the discipline. In a sense, the concept of the conference builds on the belief that all research of international politics ought to be self-reflexive. An application of methods is not simply a decision determined by research design, technical training, or theoretical aims, however elaborate and sophisticated they may be; but rather, importantly, it is informed by methodological considerations.

As the articles in this special issue show, a solid understanding of the philosophical roots of all methodological decisions we make as researchers can only benefit from the depth of such grounding in ontology and epistemology, while the outcome of our scholarly investigations of international politics increase in complexity and, through innovative methods, can capture more accurately the reality they aim to explicate. IR's interdisciplinary nature is a fertile ground for a theoretical and empirical richness that ought to be met with a heightened sense of methodological awareness. And such a state of methodological openness ought to be handled with great care every time the debate *re*-opens, and we *re*-consider the bounds of our inquiry in international politics. In the spirit of Mark Salter's and Can Mutlu's contributions to the conference and its special issue, reflecting on the state of disciplinary innovation, we ought to embrace failure as part and parcel of our research processes, reflect on its epistemological and pedagogical potential, and always refuse to find

³⁰ See Mark B. Salter, '#sorrynotsorry: A Well-meaning Response to PTJ', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

³¹ See Meera Sabaratnam, 'Staging a Battle, Losing the Wars? International Studies, "Science" and the Neoliberalisation of the University', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, this issue: XX.

ourselves at peace with failing to consider it. It is the hope of Millennium Editors of Volume 43 that the discussion and dialogue which began at our conference in October 2014 will be continued in the future. After all, it is the constant *re-*consideration of the state, scope and methods of our discipline that makes International Relations the rich field of enquiry that it is today.